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THE ARCH OF OLIVIER.

BY

John F. Sleeper

"He is the freeman whom the truth makes free."

Cowper.

The Sherwood Press.

1909.

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Elizabeth, N. J.,
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To

General Olivier.

"Where men have broken down their constitutions, invested their last penny, or patiently accepted years of very trying and toilsome work, it is only fair that they should, at least for a time, enjoy the fruits of their labour, and that others who have done little or nothing should not be permitted to rob them of it."

HAROLD BINDLOSS,

"In The Niger Country." 1898, pg. 77.

Gift
John F. Sleeper
Jan. 2, 1941

Prefatory Remarks,

A wonderful and perilous march– this successful traversal of over three hundred miles of the difficultly penetrable territory lying between Colesberg in Cape Colony and Kroonstad in the Free State; and, although the Boers modestly make light of the achievement, too much credit can scarcely be awarded to the daring and skillful leader and faithful men who so gallantly accomplished it in spite of Roberts' enormous army and vaunted strategy.

Sinister rumors are persistently circulated alleging gross neglect by the British of the many helpless prisoners now in their power; if the world was really CIVILIZED, its people would first protest and then, if necessary, intervene. There is but little likelihood of any such humane proceedures being taken, yet nevertheless, resolved to do my duty, I have added lines five to twenty of page five to those of the original poem.

August 7th, 1900.

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The
March of Olivier.

'T was in the Afric Autumn—
The wheat was in the ear—
Past dreamy Kroonstad village
The swelling Valsh wound near.

In quiet country beauty
The Boer village lay,
Engemmed 'mid rip'ning harvests,
Hard by the river's way.

The sunny skies of April
Shine o'er a smiling scene;
But Ares and Bellona
Shall crimson-warp yon green!

Ah! others than the sowers,
Shall reap the nodding grain,
And fallow lie yon corn-lands
'Till fair Peace smiles again.

For the farmers of the Free State
Have cast the sickle down,
And flung their free defiance
At the hirelings of a Crown?

* * * * * *

Lo! Kroonstad teems with action
When on its street appears
A ragged little army—
Brave men of Olivier's!

No fanfaron of trumpets,
No bombast-beat of drum,
Sound with a stormy reveille
Where these grave burghers come,

Not flush'd with vengeful triumph
From paying past arrears;
Wearing no crime-stain'd laurels
Heavy with human tears!

When into Kroonstad village
Inrode their toil-worn band,
By mountain breezes roughened,
By bright veldt sunshine tanned,

The Boers' approving silence,
The Irish legion's cheers,
Welcomed these after-Xenophons—
These troops of Olivier's.

Long—long, their march, and daring
From afar Cape Colony
Along the grim wild borderland
Where the Bantu skirts their lea.

Through many a winding valley,
O'er many a brush-crowned hill;
Past many a lonely hamlet
Safe from the Briton still!

Past dismal heaps of ashes,
Marking once happy homes
Where now the Wehr-wolf, Ruin,
In sounding silence roams.

'Round where the famed Black Mountain
Sent'nels the Caledon;
And day and night through danger-land
By OLIVIER led on;

With French's vaunted cavalry
And many a British force,
Manoeuvred near to hem them in
Or turn their onward course.

But FORWARD pressed the dauntless—
The farmer-hero band—
Save when they paused to strike a blow
At the spoilers of their land.

Fast and heavy fell such strokes,
Like the knout's on Russia's slaves;
Foeman on foeman laying low
Ne'er to be buried in graves!

At COLESBERG had the Briton,
Reared the white sheet of shame
And THABN'CHU and LADYBRAND
Wove cypress o'er his fame.

And many a minor skirmish
Had seen his red-cross flag
Downtrodden deep in robber blood,
A rent, dishonored, rag!

Oh! the Sword seems dim and rayless
When a Tyrant bares its blade;
But electric-like it flashes,
When by FREEMEN 'tis displayed

And Freemen now uphold it
In an unequal fight,
For their broad lands and liberties,
All jeopardized by Might!

And yonder came they marching,
Brave, simple, men of thew,
Right full of honest purpose,
With kindly hearts and true!

Fresh from the field and farmstead—
New to war's bloody game,—
From Winberg and from Colesberg,
And Harrismith, they came;

Ah! sad the breeze seemed bearing,
As on the troopers tramped,
Their starving infants wailing
In far-off prisons camped;

All dear them had been gathered,
As a Kaffir corrals game,
And penned like helpless cattle
In murder-camps of shame.

Moving each Boer, in passion
To raise his rifle high,
And vow unto his god beyond
The blue dome of the sky,

That never should that weapon hang
Inactive on Home's wall
Till slain or captive he should be—
Or 'venged those children, all.

On! in portentous silence,
Each with resolved, set face,
Marched, barless, till he grounded arms
In Kroonstad market-place.

Worn by a hundred hardships—
Like fantasias these, of dreams;
From o'er the boulder'd koppjes
And through the torrent-streams,

With old men bearing rifles
Relict of olden time;
Keeping quick step with children;
And folk of middle prime

With garments rent and soil-stained,
But souls devoid of fear,
Safe into Kroonstad village
March'd the Boers with Olivier.

They'd fought and toiled and triumph'd;
Lo! their goal was won at last!
Despite the mercenary might
All England 'gainst them massed.

Hail unto the heroes all!
Hail unto the farmer band!
Braving exile; daring death;
Martyrdom for Fatherland!

Their deeds shall never perish,
Freemen shall hold them dear,
And gladden o'er the glory
Of skillful Olivier.

And when the war is over
And fractur'd England's chain—
Or darken'd with dishonor.
Victoria's latter reign—

Grandsires shall tell the children,
On each recurrent year,
Of Afrikander prowess;
Of "The March of Olivier."

THE END.

THE NATION OR INDIVIDUAL THAT, ALTHOUGH POSSESSED OF THE POWER TO PREVENT IT, BEHOLDS WITH INDIFFERENCE, APPROVAL, OR APATHY, THE TYRANNY OF A POWERFUL STATE OR RULER IN THE WRONG OVER A WEAKER COMMUNITY OR BEING WHOSE CAUSE IS RIGHT, CAN TRUTHFULLY LAY NO CLAIM WHATEVER TO CIVILIZATION.

WEALTH, RELIGION, INDUSTRY, PROGRESS IN ART AND SCIENCE,--ALL--FAIL, OF THEMSELVES ALONE, TO CIVILIZE; IT IS THE HOMELY VIRTUES THAT SURELY TEND TO ELEVATE A COMMONWEALTH OR AN INDIVIDUAL TOWARDS AN IDEAL STATE.

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